

Experiencing Homelessness

The First Report Card on Homelessness in Fredericton, New Brunswick

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The Current Situation in Fredericton

Homelessness Indicators	2008
Number of individuals who stayed in the Fredericton Homeless Shelters	485
Number of times shelter beds were used	14,974
Average length of stay in emergency shelters (days)	6.7 *
Fredericton Food Bank Usage (by household)	1,279
Community Kitchen Meals Served	139,942
Housing Indicators	
Number of families and individuals on Affordable Housing Wait List (September)	484
Public Housing Units	353
Non-Profit Housing Units	339
Provincially subsidized units in private dwellings	63
New units opened in 2008 Affordable Rental Housing	8
Fredericton Rental Vacancy Rate (page 4)	4.3%
Average Rent for 1 bedroom apartment	\$589
Income Indicators	
Social assistance for a single person	\$294
# individuals on social assistance in the Fredericton Area (includes those on disability assistance)	6,979
Minimum Wage in NB (end 2008)	\$7.75

*The number listed here does not reflect the reality that while some stays are only days long, many people stay for several weeks, months and even years.

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

- Living on the street.
- Staying overnight in emergency shelters.
- Staying in places not meant for human habitation.
- Moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by friends, family or strangers ("couch surfing").

WHO IS "AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS"?

- Families and individuals can lose their housing for any number of reasons: fleeing abuse, losing a job or having an income too low to stay in suitable housing.
- Some people are at risk because of mental health issues or substance use problems or they lack the life skills or ability to live on their own.

Report Card Coordinated by:

The Community Action Group on Homelessness (CAGH)



Community
Action Group
on Homelessness
Fredericton, NB

is a network of 30+ non-profit organizations, individuals, and representatives from the three levels of government who identify and work on solutions to ending homelessness.

This is the first Report Card on Homelessness in Fredericton. It presents a profile of homelessness in the city and surrounding areas. Future progress or lack of progress in Fredericton will be measured using the main category indicators in the table above and on page 5 of this report.

Critical History: *mental health de-institutionalization and homelessness*

Starting in the 1960s and leading right up to today, de-institutionalization has formed the cornerstone of mental health policy for this population in provinces across Canada. The objective of de-institutionalization was to close psychiatric institutions and discharge persons with severe and persistent mental illness into the community while developing community-based services to replace institutional ones. Ultimately, the goal of deinstitutionalization was to support these individuals to become integrated into Canadian society and assume to the greatest extent possible normal societal roles. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons this worthwhile goal is still far from being realized. There is consensus in the mental health sector that de-institutionalization has been implemented before critical community services were developed in the areas of housing, support, education,

and employment. A major contributing factor to this lack of preparation was the very slow pace adopted by provincial governments in re-allocating resources from institutions to community services. In the context of de-institutionalization,



persons with severe and persistent mental illness and their families have suffered greatly and experienced many negative consequences as they attempt to build a life for themselves in the community. In particular, a substantial num-

ber have experienced homelessness. A study conducted in 1996 in Toronto by researchers at the former Clarke Institute of Psychiatry on the pathways leading into homelessness estimated that 15-20% of persons using emergency shelters had a severe and persistent mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Those who are housed often live in substandard housing and are frequently at a high risk of losing it. Very few individuals in this population are working for pay, and consequently find themselves living in poverty with minimal resources for basic needs, let alone for pursuing leisure or social activities.

-Centre for Research on Community Services, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tim Aubry, University of Ottawa, June 2003

Gaps in the System: local advocacy aims to raise awareness and end homelessness.

The Community Action Group on Homelessness (CAGH)

The CAGH is concerned about the needs of the homeless population going unmet. Provincial and non-profit services are generally meant to be available to all people depending on the type of service needed and offered. For the homeless population, accessing services can be very difficult. For example, if you have no home to store your belongings in, it is hard to keep track of appointment papers and ID. Also, literacy affects how a person accesses services and looks after their own health (problems reading the phone book or medication instructions). And what about those in our community who suffer from illnesses such as: mental illness, chronic illness, and addictions? While there are services available for people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of becoming homeless, there is a huge gap in our system regarding access and support for this population.

Average Monthly Rents in Fredericton			
Unit size	Oct 2007	Oct 2008	NB - 2008
Bachelor	\$546	\$520	\$439
1 Bedroom	\$586	\$589	\$525
2 Bedrooms	\$701	\$697	\$635
3+ Bedrooms	\$888	\$927	\$737

(Source: CMHC Rental Market Report - NB Highlights - Fall 2008)

Someone working full time in Fredericton at minimum wage would earn roughly \$1,300 a month. They would spend 45% of their income on rent in a one-bedroom apartment. And then there's the electricity bill, the taxes, the water, the groceries...

Emergency Housing - The Facts

Shelter Usage* in Fredericton			
	2008	2007	Age (2008)
Males	389	350	16 - 83
Females	96	102	16 - 72
TOTAL	485	452	
Bed Nights	14,974	13,795	

*number of different individuals

Who uses the Shelters?

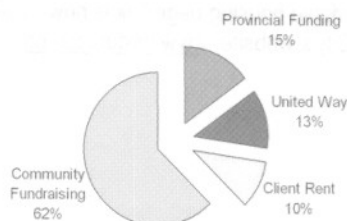
Poverty is at the root of most people's experience with homelessness. In addition to that are individuals facing challenges who have fallen through the cracks of our system, for example, those experiencing mental illness, addictions, literacy problems and learning disabilities. As well, shelter residents might be individuals who find themselves unemployed and without a support network to see them through until they find employment and housing.

Cost of Operating the Fredericton Homeless Shelter

Annual Operating Cost **\$ 400,000.00**

Income Sources:

Provincial Funding	\$ 60,000.00
United Way	\$ 50,000.00
Client Rent	\$ 40,000.00
Community Fund Raising	\$ 250,000.00



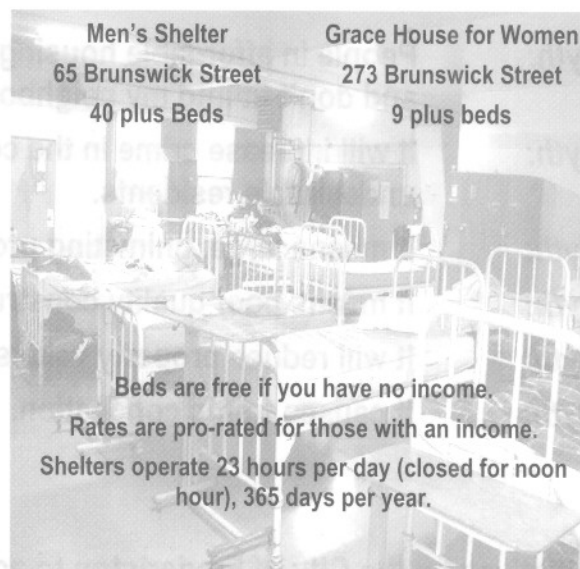
Additional Shelter Options for Females

Chrysalis House:

Located in Fredericton, Chrysalis House is the only long term transition house for young women in the province. Female youth aged 16-19 may stay for up to a year as they strengthen their life skills and move towards independence. There are no facilities for young men in the City. The Men's Homeless Shelter is meant for adults and many would agree that placing a 16 year old boy in a large shelter environment does not meet the youth's needs.

Women in Transition House:

A shelter for women leaving violence. This is different from a women's homeless shelter. Grace House and Women In Transition House are two separate organizations offering different services. Grace House is operated by the Fredericton Homeless Shelters, Inc. and houses women experiencing homelessness. Women in Transition House is tailored to address the issues of violence against women and has additional security and services.



"There are no facilities for young men in the City."

Affordable Housing

- Myth:** People in affordable housing are on social assistance and don't fit into my neighbourhood.
- Myth:** It will increase crime in the community and bring in undesirable residents.
- Myth:** It means large, uninviting projects.
- Myth:** It means poor quality construction.
- Myth:** It will reduce property values.
- Myth:** It causes traffic congestion.

Initiatives by the City of Fredericton to address affordable housing needs

An Affordable Housing Committee, chaired by Councillor Mike O'Brien was created by Fredericton City Council in November 2006 to promote and facilitate an increase in affordable housing construction. Its membership currently includes representatives from all three levels of government – Federal, Municipal and Provincial; various non-profit and business groups; the off-reserve aboriginal community and developers.

Two Annual Affordable Housing Days have been co-sponsored by NB Non-Profit Housing Association, the City, and the Provincial and Federal governments. The purpose is to raise public awareness of issues, needs and opportunities.

An affordable housing page link is now available on the City's website: www.fredericton.ca

PROFILE of a local non-profit housing provider

Fredericton Non-Profit Housing Corp. currently manages 90 affordable housing units throughout the city of Fredericton and outlying areas. These units co-exist in various neighbourhoods throughout the city debunking any of the above myths about affordable housing and are essential to local housing development. Tenants are families and individuals under the age of 65.



Words to know

Long-term supportive housing - Housing for individuals and families that include supports and services integrated into the housing, and no length-of-stay duration. Services depend on individual needs and are provided to help residents maintain independence and stability to promote social inclusion.

Affordable housing – Usually available for individuals and families of lower income or with special needs who cannot afford private market housing. Housing is affordable when it costs less than 30% of your after-tax income.

Transitional housing - Housing facilities that provide services beyond basic needs and that, while not permanent, generally allow for a longer length of stay than emergency housing facilities (up to three years). They are targeted to those in need of structure, support, and/or skill building to move from homelessness to housing stability, and ultimately to prevent a return to homelessness.

Vacancy rate – The vacancy rate is simply the number of vacant units divided by the sample of rental units surveyed; it is then expressed as a percentage. The lower the vacancy rate the more difficult it will be for prospective renters to find suitable accommodation. A 3% vacancy rate indicates a somewhat balanced rental market. Lower rates indicate a tight supply of units with a tendency for rising rents.

Social housing - Public, co-op or non-profit housing with long-term government subsidies paid to a housing provider (three or more years).

Examples of Fredericton Programs

City Voucher Campaign: This program, formerly operated by the John Howard Society of Fredericton, linked panhandlers in the downtown core, with downtown businesses to complete small jobs. Participants received a gift certificate for their work. The results of this program went far beyond financial results with 3 of 19 participants finding long term employment. The program reduced the numbers of people panhandling and renewed the self-confidence of the participants.

Street Outreach Program: The Fredericton YMCA and the John Howard Society of Fredericton ran an outreach program staffed by 2 full-time street outreach workers. The purpose of the program was to link individuals experiencing homelessness with services that could assist them. There are many services in our community that assist individuals experiencing homelessness, but connecting to those services can be difficult when you are living on the street and in extreme poverty. The Community Health Clinic runs an outreach program supported by various volunteers, social work students and nursing students.

Street Outreach and Voucher Campaign participant testimonial:

(The following is a summary of the participant's story)

"To supplement my income I have often used panhandling. Mavis Doucette (John Howard Society – Outreach Services) approached me about a new project they were offering called the City Voucher Campaign. She explained to me that they would pair me up with a business that would meet my needs as well as help to dispel myths that businesses had about people who panhandle.

Shortly after starting the Voucher campaign I approached my case manager at Social Development about accessing a work placement. I did a 12-week placement at the Community Kitchen and my self-confidence grew leaps & bounds. When the placement ended though, I found myself back panhandling. It seems you

always go back to what you know. Mavis approached me again and I was happy to be back on the program and realized that I was willing to stop taking hand outs and ready to accept a hand up.

"Would my disability allow me to work in a fast paced environment?"

This fall I was asked to speak at a fund-raising event. As a result, I was offered a part time job with a local business. I was thrilled and scared to death all at the same time. I had tried interviews before only to have my hopes dashed when they found out about my

prior drug use. Could I do it? Would my disability allow me to work in a fast paced environment? I thought here is your chance. When I first started it was overwhelming but with the encouragement from management and Mavis, who continues to stay in touch, I stuck it out.

I am now working 3 days a week, which will eventually allow me to get off Social Assistance. What does this mean to me you may ask? I feel proud that I am standing on my own two feet and that for the first time in my adult life I will have a home where I and I alone am responsible for paying the rent. I am now a contributing member of society looking forward to filling out a tax return."

The City Voucher Campaign and Street Outreach Program both ended in 2008 due to lack of funding. The needs of the homeless population still exist. Our Municipal, Provincial, Federal governments and business community can partner their resources to make sure programs with impact continue.

Homelessness Indicators	2008
Number of emergency shelter beds in Fredericton:	
For men	40
For women (domestic violence)	19
For women (not domestic violence)	9
Number of overflow beds	5
Number of beds for drug/alcohol detox	10
For men	6
For women	4
Number of food banks	2
Number of soup kitchens	1
Number of NB individuals assisted Hunger Count 2008	15,636
Housing Indicators	
Number of transitional housing (units)	8
Number of transitional housing (beds)	8
Number of long-term supportive housing (beds)	204
Population of Fredericton	50,535

What can be done to end and prevent homelessness?

Governments Can:

Provincial

- Enact the proposed changes to the NB Tenancies Act into law so that rooming house residents have protection.
- Increase social assistance rates and act on their Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Collaborate with other levels of government more often and more effectively.
- Support community work by stabilizing funding through longer term contracts for non-profit communities.

Municipal

- Continue advocacy with the provincial and federal governments to promote affordable housing as good social policy.
- Encourage local developers to provide diverse and innovative affordable housing.
- Contribute financially to programs that address homelessness at the street level.
- Take a proactive approach in the municipal planning process on affordable housing.

Federal

- Increase funding for housing initiatives.
- Stabilize funding to programs on a long term basis (5 or more years).
- Make transfers of funds to provinces quicker.
- Increase resources for Mental Health services.

You Can:

- **Be aware of and help change attitudes** about homelessness among your friends, family and people within the community to help reduce NIMBY ("not in my backyard") reactions.
- Contact local charities and non-profit organizations and offer to **volunteer, make a donation of money or ask what they need** – then provide it.
- **Treat everyone with respect - smile!** People experiencing homelessness are part of the community – a friendly face can make anyone's day brighter.

The Community Can:

- Learn more about the issues. The Community Action Group on Homelessness meets monthly to discuss progress on current projects and issues as well as to work on plans in a collaborative manner. Anyone interested in homelessness issues can contact the Coordinator for more information: 444-8199.
- Advocate to all levels of government to end homelessness – it is possible.
- Look for affordable housing development opportunities in our neighbourhoods.

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family [sic], including adequate food, clothing and housing".

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Need help?

Fredericton Food Bank: 459-7461

Community Kitchen: 457-1778

Social Development (income asst): 444-8838

Fredericton Homeless Shelters: 450-1102

Grace House: 450-3001

Resource Links:

www.frederictonsvitalsigns.ca

www.frederictoninfo.ca

www.raisingtheroof.org

www.homelesshub.ca

Coming April 2009 → The *First Annual Provincial Report Card on Homelessness*. See how different communities compare in their work to end homelessness. Also, find out what happens when a community does not have services to address homelessness.

Coming March 2010 → Fredericton's 2nd Annual Report Card on Homelessness with grades on our community's progress preventing and ending homelessness.